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Lincoln, the Law, and Presidential Leadership

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Lincoln, the Law, and Presidential Leadership, edited by Charles M. Hubbard. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2015. x, 214 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$34.50 hardcover and e-book.

Reviewer Timothy Walch is director emeritus of the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and a volunteer at the State Historical Society of Iowa in Iowa City.

Yet another book about Abraham Lincoln is not always a welcome event. Indeed, it is often said that no historical figure other than Jesus Christ has generated as many books as the sixteenth president of the United States. Can it be that scholars have anything more to say about this man?

As surprising as it might be, we have not yet exhausted the topic. Thanks to Charles M. Hubbard, Lincoln Historian at Lincoln Memorial University, we have a fresh collection of essays on various aspects of Lincoln's application of constitutional law. Together, these nine chapters fit together neatly to remind us of the intricate nature of Lincoln's views on the law.

As can be surmised from the title, this is not a book for the average history buff. Although all of the essays are well written, the subject matter is specialized. To benefit from this volume, readers should have an interest in how Lincoln applied his personal commitment to the law and his understanding of the Constitution to presidential decision making.

Given that caveat, the book offers a range of perspectives from a diverse collection of experienced Lincoln scholars. The list of topics is impressive: civil liberties, presidential pardons, executive decision making, political ideology, the responsibilities of citizenship, constitutional restraints, the loyalty of government employees, and much more.

Almost in the manner of a jazz ensemble, each contributor steps forward to play a solo. Daniel Stowell focuses on the connection between the law and decision making. Mark Steiner follows on immigration and citizenship. Then comes Charles Hubbard on slavery and national unity and Frank Williams on civil liberties during wartime. Edna Greene Medford evaluates Lincoln's paradoxical path to emancipation. She is succeeded by Ron Soodalter, who writes about Lincoln's sense of mercy and social justice. The last three chapters are by Bruce Carnahan (military practices toward civilians), Natalie Sweet (loyalty and treason) and Jason R. Jividen (Lincoln's impact on his successors).

Even though there is much to admire in these essays, there is precious little on Iowa or the Midwest. Iowa is not mentioned at all, and only Mark Steiner's essay on Lincoln and citizenship includes brief passages (pp. 7–18 and 36–42) on Lincoln's life and work in Illinois. Does it matter that this book doesn't have much to say about Lincoln's ties to the Midwest? Perhaps not. If it's true that Lincoln belongs to the ages, it also must be said that he belongs to all the states.